
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5357

AN ACT CONCERNING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM.

SUMMARY:

This bill requires a local or regional board of education to form a district-wide school attendance review team ("review team") if the school district has a:

1. 10% or greater district chronic absenteeism rate, or
2. 15% or greater chronic absenteeism rate at a single school.

Under the bill, a student is chronically absent if he or she has 18 or more unexcused absences from school in the 180-day school year (see BACKGROUND). A school district's or individual school's chronic absentee rate is the percentage of a district's or school's students who are chronically absent compared to the total number of students enrolled in the district or school, respectively.

The bill requires each board of education to add the number of chronically absent children, to the annual strategic school profile, which by law each district must provide for each of its schools and the district as a whole. It also specifies that the profile must state the number of truants rather than report on truancy in general. By law, a truant is a student with four or more unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in any school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2014

DISTRICT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW TEAM

The review team must meet at least monthly and is responsible for (1) reviewing the cases of chronically absent children, (2) discussing school interventions and community referrals as necessary, and (3) making any additional recommendations for the children and their

families.

Under the bill, the review team can (1) consist of school administrators, guidance counselors, school social workers, teachers, and staff from community-based programs designed to improve student attendance at school, (2) provide assistance to students who are truant, or (3) any other appropriate services.

BACKGROUND

Excused and Unexcused Absences

The State Board of Education adopted definitions of excused and unexcused absences, as it was required to do by law, on June 27, 2012.

An absence is considered excused if:

1. For absences one through nine, the student provides written documentation (i.e., a signed note from parent or guardian) of the reason for the absence submitted within 10 school days of the student's return to school and
2. For the 10th and any additional absences the same written documentation is need and only the following reasons suffice: (a) student illness (with appropriate verification from a medical professional), (b) observance of a religious holiday, (c) death in the family or other emergency beyond the family's control, (d) mandated court appearance, (e) lack of transportation that the district normally provides, or (f) extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the district in accordance with SDE guidance.

An absence is considered unexcused unless it meets one of the definitions of an excused absence or is a disciplinary absence. All other absences are unexcused.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 1 (03/19/2014)